

I was in London for a moment. Just long enough to learn how to walk and talk and gather a few memories before leaving for Staten Island where I grew up. Grew up too fast in some respects but not fast enough to outgrow the adolescent flaws and shortcomings of character to which I would steadily succumb in a sad way. I was 15, Susan 13 when we moved beyond a casual association and began a teenage romance in the spring of 1975. (An interracial relationship given that I am black/biracial, Susan white.) Susan lived in the same tree lined neighborhood as my friends and she and I had what you might call a peripheral friendship for several years. Our attachment began when a group of us were playing baseball and I got hit in the face by the backswing of Susan's bat. As I was up next, I was standing too close to home plate and inattentive the moment the swing came round and sent me to the hospital for three stitches. Hours later I assured Susan I was okay and joked with her. Continued to joke and laugh with Susan in the following days and began talking with her on the telephone, her front porch, and during walks around the neighborhood. I guess no matter how many times you encounter someone in a marginal way, you never really see that person whole until sustained eye contact and discourse allow you to absorb and intuit the traits that create individuality. I had come across Susan countless times whether as

teammates in wiffleball games played when the  
 summer air turned aromatic from backyard  
 barbecues or among a group sledding down the  
 steep, icy street past snowmen sitting hatted,  
 scarfed, and smiling under winter moonlight.  
 Saw Susan on innumerable occasions and  
 exchanged just as many hellos the way kids  
 who lived in and frequented the same  
 neighborhood invariably did. Walked to her  
 when carrying umbrellas in the rain and  
 chatted together with friends beneath a leafy  
 tree while Elton John's "Island Girl" spiraled  
 from someone's radio and wound us in an  
 ephemeral ribbon of mid-70s pop songs we  
 would one day hear again when our lives  
 harbored much less laughter. Saw Susan everywhere  
 but never saw her until I began speaking to her  
 at length and listening open eared to what she  
 had to say about ~~school~~ music friends and other  
 sundry subjects large and small. Began attending  
 her little league baseball games Saturday mornings  
 with a few friends who were unaware of my growing  
 interest in her. ~~Told them~~ <sup>suggested</sup> we'd ride our bikes  
 to the ballfield on Walker Avenue and root for  
 Susan's team. Something new for us to do. Of  
 course it wasn't long before my friends got bored  
 and I found myself sitting in the wooden  
 bleachers with strangers beside me and Susan sepe  
 in the outfield with glove at the ready and  
 mid-morning sun on the rise. Your friends

are your world. I found such words inarguable  
 in the 1970s when my friends and I were  
 practically inseparable at the mall, on the subway  
 to Madison Square Garden or on a different subway  
 on a different day headed to a Mets game at  
 Shea Stadium. We pretty much always had something  
 to do. Whether playing hockey on a residential  
 street or shooting basketballs at the CJO, our  
 energy and enthusiasm ran like a river toward  
 an eddy where it whirled round a few times  
 before rushing on. Spontaneity was the spirit  
 with which we chased fun the way we  
 chased one another from house to house on  
 blustery Halloween nights when jack-o'-lanterns  
 inflamed the darkness and our shouts and laughter  
 carried in the cool air and mingled with the  
 hurly-burly of blowing leaves. I never envisioned  
 a moment when I'd spend more time with  
 someone other than my immediate friends to  
 whom I felt solidly anchored, yet I gradually  
 became unmoored by my attraction to Susan and  
 drifted toward her, her interests, her world. I  
 began attending church with Susan and her siblings  
 on Sunday mornings as well as playing afternoon  
 card games with them in their home. After school  
 Susan and I typically got together to do our homework  
 at the Port Richmond Public Library. Some Saturdays  
 we'd bike ride to Clove Lakes Park and sit on a  
 bench and talk while ducks spun languorously  
 atop the water. Other days we'd visit a local

Pizza parlor to sit and chat with pizza and pepsi on the table and the smell of fresh dough creating an evocative comfort. The snows of December arrived and I was genuinely infatuated with Susan. Happy in her presence and seeing her in song and dream when not. I don't recall thinking of much else but her at that time and if love is a spirit all compact and fire, as Shakespeare wrote, then I was clearly in love. Wake up each morning anticipating the sight and sound of Susan. The play of freckles below the blue eyes, the girlish intonations. Spent a little more time in the shower, with the toothbrush, in the mirror. School became an hourglass through which the sands of my anticipation gradually streamed until I was with Susan again at her dining room table playing Monopoly with her brothers and sisters amid a volley of giggles and chatter resonating with the undertone of Welcome Back Kotter on television in an adjacent room. I was quietly elated with life as it was and oblivious to the Ocean of December darkness stretching far miles beyond Susan's well lit suburban home on the corner. Christmas eve I accompanied Susan and her family to midnight mass and sat attentively among the close gathering while the service proceeded with a solemn message I received piecemeal because I was recurrently drawn to the church's sweep of stained glass. Determined to listen yet losing myself in the surrounding mosaic.

years later I would wonder about the message that night. Wonder if it contained a portent. An attempt to shield me from the darkness outside which held lethal possibilities I neither understood nor cared about. The miasma of darkness that would enter my soul and replicate in my mind.

It came 1976 and the insanity and the whole painful mess I am about to relate succinctly simply because it's disturbing. I strangled Susan and concealed her body in a metal barrel in a wooded area across from a Procter and Gamble factory on Staten Island. The crime occurred May 15, 1976. I was 16, Susan 14. I committed the crime because Susan and I had had sex which led to an abortion and an end to our relationship. I was distraught for weeks and considered suicide and then murder as a means of ending the hurt. Began to think and began to be undermined. Deluded myself into believing I could kill someone I loved and escape the emotional vortex I was too weak to pull myself from. Had no sense of time's ability to heal, knew nothing of its mercy. Committed my crime and engaged in a sweeping act of self-betrayal in an effort to conceal it. Time commenced as did my guilt. I confided in two friends in an effort to share my guilt and lessen it. It didn't work, couldn't. I was alone with my burden, my horror. I no longer fit in with my friends. I had stepped over a divide from which I couldn't return.

A murder I committed for reasons I couldn't possibly articulate. I don't recall how long I remained standing in that room confronting the permanence of my crime. Its magnitude, madness, senselessness. In many respects I have never relinquished that moment. Never stopped mining for answers that don't exist.